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**REMARKS**

Claims 1-6, 8, 9 and 11-20 are pending in the application. By the foregoing amendments, claims 3, 4, 8, 9, 12 and 15 have been cancelled and new claim 21 has been added. Of these claims, claims 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14 and 16-20 stand rejected. In particular, claims 1, 2, 5, 6, 14 and 16-19 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102 as being anticipated by Oetiker, U.S. Patent No. 5,001,816. Claims 11 and 13 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being unpatentable over Oetiker in view of Buedenbender, EP 2 888 84 B. According to the Office Action, it would have been obvious to one of skill in the art to combine Oetiker with the laser welding process of Buedenbender to join the strip edges together in a less destructive way. Finally, claim 20 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being unpatentable over Oetiker in view of Steingroever, U.S. Patent No. 5,813,264. According to the Office Action, it would have been obvious to combine the method of Oetiker with the electro-magnetic deformation process of Steingroever in order to evenly deform the clamping ring around the sleeve.

Applicant traverses each of these rejections and submits that the application, as amended, is in a condition for allowance. In this regard, Applicant has made several clarifying amendments to each of the independent claims. As amended, independent claims 1, 5, 18, 19, 20 and 21 each require that the strip ends each have a single straight edge which extends at a right angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion, or that the strip ends each have a single straight edge which extends at an oblique angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion, which none of the references disclose or suggest.

The Oetiker reference discloses several embodiments for connecting two edges of an elongated strip, but in all instances, Oetiker requires a form-locking engagement of the ends of the strip material. In other words, at least one edge includes a retaining element which form-lockingly engages a corresponding recess provided in the other edge to provide a mechanical engagement between the two ends of the elongated strip.

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Accordingly, each of claims 1, 2, 5, 6, 14 and 16-19 are novel in view of Oetiker because Oetiker fails to disclose or suggest that the strip ends each have a single straight edge which extends at a right angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion or that the strip ends each have a straight edge which extends at an oblique angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion. Accordingly, the rejection of claims 1, 2, 5, 6, 14 and 16-19 under 35 U.S.C. §102 should be withdrawn.

The rejection of claims 11, 13 and 20, which all rely upon Oetiker in combination with either Buedenbender or Steingroever, should also be withdrawn for at least the same reasons. That is, claim 11 requires that the strip ends each have a single straight edge which extends at a right angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion; and claim 13 requires that the strip ends each have a single straight edge which extends at an oblique (non-right) angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion, which the combination of Oetiker and Buedenbender fails to disclose or suggest. Claim 20 also requires that the strip ends each have a single straight edge which extends at a right angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion, which Oetiker and Steingroever, either alone or in combination, fails to disclose or suggest.

Applicant further traverses the suggestion in the Office Action that one of skill in the art would be motivated to combine Oetiker and Buedenbender to arrive at the claimed invention. Buedenbender discloses welding of sheet metal and plastic balls but requires in all instances that, when viewed in cross-section, the pieces to be joined have profiled edges (see all figures of Buedenbender). None of these profiled edges in Buedenbender are provided by a cutting process. Rather, Buedenbender requires that the profiled edges be produced by a rolling method. Accordingly, the present claims are further distinguished from the combination of Buedenbender and Oetiker in that the claims of the present application require that the step of producing include cutting the strip ends to each have a single straight edge extended at a right angle or a non-right angle relative to the longitudinal direction of the strip portion. For this addition reason, the rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103 of claims 11 and 13 should be withdrawn.

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Similarly, Steingroever discloses impulse forming for different metal tubes which are inserted into one another. However, Steingroever does not suggest whatsoever that a rubber or elastomer boot can be fixed to a clamp band by such a technique as claimed in claims 20 and 21 herein. For this additional reason, Applicant requests that the rejection of claim 20 under 35 U.S.C. §103 in view of Steingroever and Oetiker be withdrawn.

With regard to the drawing objections set forth in the Office Action, claims 8 and 9 have been cancelled as suggested in the Office Action to overcome this objection.

Having overcome all of the objections and rejections set forth in the Office Action, Applicant submits that claims 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14 and 16-21 are in a condition for allowance. A Notice of Allowance indicating the same is therefore earnestly solicited. A Petition for Extension of Time (three months) accompanies this paper. The Examiner is invited to telephone the Applicant's undersigned attorney at (248) 223-9500 if any unresolved matters remain.

Respectfully Submitted,

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